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ABSTRACT

In this paper parents' educational and occupational aspirations for their children enrolled in bilingual elementary school programs are examined. The parents' place of birth, dominant language, educational background and occupation were the main independent variables measured. Interviews were conducted with 68 parents with children in Chicago bilingual education centers in the summer of 1975. Questions asked of the parents included: What career would they like their children to pursue?, How many years would they like their children to remain in school?, and How many years did they expect their children would remain in school? Parents born in the U.S. who had attained a high school or higher educational level were found to have higher educational and occupational aspirations for their children than those born outside the U.S. who had achieved less than a high school education. Quantified results of this limited study are presented in statistical tables. The need for further research is mentioned. (GC)

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Parents' Career Aspirations for their Children Enrolled in Bilingual Programs

Introduction

One measure of the success of a bilingual program is the degree that parents are actively involved in the operation of bilingual education programs as teacher aides, school-community representatives and members of advisory councils. Evaluation studies have cited positive attitudes of parents toward bilingual programs and have noted the degree of participation by various ethnic and language groups in these programs. However, there is a paucity of data concerning other school-related parental roles such as parental career aspirations for their children participating in bilingual education programs. Little information exists on how occupational aspirations of parents of bilingual students are related to family SES, language dominance, pupils' attitudes toward school, motivation for study, and vocational decision-making. To explore some of these questions, a pilot study was undertaken of parental career aspirations for their children enrolled in Chicago bilingual centers during the summer of 1975.

The purpose of the study is to examine the level of parental educational and occupational aspirations for their children participating in bilingual programs. The parents' place of birth, dominant language, educational background and occupation are the main independent variables measured. Whether or not higher aspirations are related to higher SES backgrounds is a major concern of the study.

The data were obtained through telephone interviews by bilingual teacher aides employed for the summer in the Department of Research and Evaluation. Bilingual Centers were visited by the aides in order to compile a list of students and the phone number of their parents. Sixty eight

parents were interviewed using a structured interview form (see Appendix for the Questionnaire.)

Background Characteristic of Parents

Analysis of the parents' responses indicates that over two-thirds of the parents were born outside the United States-their country of origin was mainly Puerto Rico (Mother 29.8%, Father 31.3%) or Mexico (Mother 26.9%, Father 26.9%). As can be seen from Table 1, nearly half of the parents are monolingual Spanish, a third speak mainly English, and the remainder are bilingual.

Few parents went to college (mother 11.8%, father 17.2%) and nearly half reported that they had received less than a high school education (mother 45.5%, father 46.9%). In studying the occupational backgrounds of fathers, over 50 per cent are employed in the semi-skilled or skilled trades and one-fifth are working as semi-professionals or professionals. It is important to mention that 21 of the 68 fathers were either not working or not living with their families. About one-fourth of the mothers are working outside the home. Half of the families are comprised of four or more children.

Cross tabulations of parents' birthplace, and their educational background were performed. Because of the size of the sample (and to assure adequate Ns in each cell) parents' education was dichotomized: (1) high school or higher and (2) less than high school. It was found that birthplace and educational background are highly associated (Table 2). Nearly three-fourths of those born in the United States had attained a high school education or higher. On the other hand, less than one-third born in a Latin American country had gone to high school or beyond.

TABLE 1 - Background Characteristics of Parents of Sampled Students Participating in Bilingual Summer Programs 1975, Chicago

Birth Place

	Mother		Father	
	%	N	%	N
USA	37.3	(25)	34.8	(23)
Puerto Rico	29.8	(20)	31.3	(21)
Mexico	26.9	(18)	26.9	(18)
Other	6.0	(4)	6.0	(4)
	100%	(67)	100%	(66)
	NR=1		NR=2	

Dominant Language

	Mother		Father	
	%	N	%	N
English	36.4	(20)	33.4	(17)
Spanish	47.3	(26)	47.0	(24)
both	16.3	(9)	19.6	(10)
	100%	(55)	100%	(51)
	NR=(13)		NR=(14)	

Educational Background

	Mother		Father	
	%	N	%	N
Primary (Kg.-3)	19.1	(13)	14.1	(9)
Intermediate (4-5)	13.2	(9)	17.2	(11)
Upper Grades (6-8)	13.2	(9)	15.6	(10)
High School (9-12)	42.7	(29)	35.9	(23)
College (some)	8.8	(6)	14.1	(9)
College Graduate	3.0	(2)	3.1	(2)
	100%	(68)	100%	(64)
			NR=(4)	

Occupation

	Mother		Father	
	%	N	%	N
Semi-skilled	8.9	(6)	39.3	(22)
Skilled Labor	1.5	(1)	25.0	(14)
Semi-Professional	13.4	(9)	12.5	(7)
Professional	1.5	(1)	10.7	(6)
Housewife	65.7	(44)	-	-
Welfare	9.0	(6)	10.7	(6)
Unemployed	-	-	1.8	(1)
	100%	(67)	100%	(56)
	NR=(1)		NR=(14)	

Number of Children

	%	N
1	5.9	(4)
2	19.1	(13)
3	23.5	(16)
4	20.6	(14)
5	8.8	(6)
6	10.3	(7)
7+	11.8	(8)
	100%	(68)

TABLE 2 - Parents' Educational Background by Parents' Birthplace

Mother's Birthplace

Mother's Education	U.S.A. %	U.S.A. N	Latin America %	Latin America N	Other %	Other N
High School or higher	72.0	(18)	31.6	(12)	100	(4)
Less than High School	28.0	(7)	68.4	(26)	-	(0)
	100%	(25)	100%	(38)	100%	(4)

$\chi^2 = 8.32$, df = 1, $p < .01$

Father's Birthplace

Father's Education	U.S.A. %	U.S.A. N	Latin America %	Latin America N	Other %	Other N
High School or higher	78.3	(18)	30.8	(12)	100	(4)
Less than High School	21.7	(5)	69.2	(27)	-	(0)
	100%	(23)	100%	(39)	100%	(4)

$\chi^2 = 11.23$, df = 1, $p < .01$

Career Aspirations and Expectations

In order to determine career aspirations and expectations for their children, parents were asked the following questions:

1 - what would you like your son/daughter to be when he/she grows up?

2 - what does your son/daughter want to be when he/she grows up?

3 - how many years would you like your son/daughter to stay in school?

4 - how many years do you think your son/daughter will stay in school?

More than half the parents reported that they hoped their child would go to college for four or more years (Table 3). This percentage drops to slightly over 40 when parents were asked how long they thought their child would stay in school. Almost one fourth of the parents revealed that they really did not know how long their child would remain in school. This response is not unusual if the childs' age is taken into consideration. The students were enrolled in elementary schools and the parents' aspirations must be weighed over a rather long time-span.

Similar responses are noted for occupational aspirations and expectations (Table 4). Forty-six percent of the parents believe that their child would like to be employed in one of the professions or semi-professions. This figure increased to 51.6% when the parents were asked to state their own preference for their child. Again it should be noted that the number of parents who stated that they did know or who were unsure what occupation they wanted their child to follow is high. How the backgrounds of these parents vary with those who appeared to have more explicit opinions of their childrens' career plans, is analyzed in the next section.

TABLE 3 - Parents' Educational Aspirations and Expectations for their children

How many years would you like your son/daughter to stay in school?

	N	%
1 - Some high school	(4)	6.0
2 - Graduate from high school	(15)	22.4
3 - Vocational school (H.S. + 2 yrs.)	(5)	7.5
4 - 4 years of college	(24)	35.8
5 - Graduate school	(13)	19.4
6 - Do not know	(6)	8.9
	(67)	100%
NR	1	

How many years do you think your son/daughter will stay in school?

1 - Some high school	(1)	1.5
2 - Graduate from high school	(16)	23.9
3 - Vocational school (Hs + 2 yrs.)	(7)	10.4
4 - 4 years of college	(15)	22.4
5 - Graduate school	(13)	19.4
6 - Do not know	(15)	22.4
	(67)	100%
NR	1	

TABLE 4 - Occupational Aspirations of Bilingual Students and their Parents

What does your son/daughter want to be when he/she grows up?

	N	%
Professional	(13)	21.0
Semi-professional	(16)	25.8
Skilled labor	(11)	17.7
Do not know	(22)	35.5
	(62)	100%
NR	(6)	

What would you like your son/daughter to be when he/she grows up?

Professional	(16)	25.0
Semi-professional	(17)	26.6
Skilled labor	(1)	1.5
Do not know	(30)	46.9
	(64)	100%
NR	(4)	

Career Aspirations and Parents Educational Background

The cross tabulations of mothers' educational background and educational aspirations and expectations are given in Table 5. An important finding of this study is that the higher the mothers' education the higher are her educational aspirations for her child. Nearly three-fourths of the mothers who had gone to high school or beyond hope that their child would go to college or graduate school: however, this was true for only a third of mothers with less than a college education. A similar result is evident for their expectations. More than 60 percent of mothers with high school or higher educational backgrounds said that they thought their child would go to college or even graduate school. Just over 20 percent of mothers with less than a high school education gave the same response. The above pattern is evident when analyzing the relationship between fathers' educational background and career aspirations for children (Table 6).

Summary and Conclusions

Several shortcomings of this pilot-study are evident. The sample size is not sufficient to permit much more than an analysis of two variables. Unfortunately, data on the students' age, birthplace, language dominance, year in a bilingual program, and academic performance were not collected. Nonetheless, several patterns do emerge from the study which are worthy of further elaboration.

TABLE 6 - Educational Aspirations and Expectations for Child, by Educational Background of mother

	Mother's Education			
	High School or Higher		Less than High School	
	N	%	N	%
Educational Aspirations for Child				
1 - Some high school	(0)	--	(4)	13.3
2 - Graduate from high school	(5)	14.3	(9)	30.0
3 - Vocational school (HS + 2 yrs.)	(3)	8.6	(1)	3.3
4 - 4 yrs. college	(16)	45.7	(8)	26.7
5 - Graduate school	(10)	28.6	(3)	10.0
6 - Do not know	(1)	2.8	(5)	16.7
(NR=3)	(35)	100%	(30)	100%
Educational Expectations for Child				
1 - Some high school	(0)	--	(0)	--
2 - Graduate from high school	(7)	20.0	(7)	24.1
3 - Vocational school (HS + 2 yrs.)	(2)	5.8	(5)	17.3
4 - 4 yrs. college	(11)	31.4	(4)	13.8
5 - Graduate school	(11)	31.4	(2)	6.9
6 - Do not know	(4)	11.4	(11)	37.9
(NR=4)	(35)	100%	(29)	100%

TABLE 6 - Educational Aspiration and Expections for Child, by Educational Background of Father

	Father's Education			
	High School or Higher		Less than High School	
	N	%	N	%
Educational Aspirations for Child				
1 - Some high school	(1)	3.0	(3)	10.0
2 - Graduate from high school	(3)	9.1	(10)	33.3
3 - Vocational school (H.S. + 2 yrs.)	(3)	9.1	(2)	6.7
4 - 4 years college	(13)	39.4	(11)	36.6
5 - Graduate school	(10)	30.3	(2)	6.7
6 - Do not know	(3)	9.1	(2)	6.7
NR (5)	(33)	100%	(30)	100%
Educational Expectation for Child				
1 - Some high school	(0)	--	(0)	--
2 - Graduate from high school	(7)	21.2	(8)	27.6
3 - Vocational school (H.S. + 2 yrs.)	(2)	6.1	(2)	6.9
4 - 4 yr. college	(10)	30.3	(9)	31.0
5 - Graduate school	(8)	24.2	(4)	13.8
6 - Do not know	(6)	18.2	(6)	20.7
	(33)	100%	(29)	100%

(NR = 6)

It appears that two different groups of parents were interviewed: (1) those born in the USA who had attained a high school or higher educational level, and (2) those born outside the USA who had achieved less than a high school education. The former group of parents tends to have higher educational and occupational aspirations for their children than does the latter group. This is an important though not unique finding. Results of other studies on occupational decision-making support the findings of this pilot study.

The extent to which participation in a bilingual education program might change the above pattern is an important question that merits further attention. Whether or not successful performance in bilingual programs could help to ameliorate the apparent disadvantages of low SES backgrounds in career decision-making is a question that could be analyzed in subsequent research efforts.

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Bilingual Center Parent Questionnaire

1. Place of Birth

   Mother _____ Father _____

2. Dominant Language

   Mother _____ Father _____

3. Educational Background

Mother	Father	
1	1	1-primary (kg-3)
2	2	2-intermediate (4-5)
3	3	3-upper grades (6-8)
4	4	4-high school (9-12)
5	5	5-college (some)
6	6	6-college graduate

4. Occupation

Mother	Father	
1	1	1-unemployed
2	2	2-semi-skilled (waiter, factory)
3	3	3-Skilled labor (carpenter, police)
4	4	4-Semi-professional (Nurse, etc.)
5	5	5-Professional (teachers, Supervisors)
6	6	6-Professional and high income (lawyers, physician, college professors)
7	7	7-house wife
8	8	8-ADC (welfare)

5. No. of children _____

6. No. of children in summer program ____

7. What does your son/daughter want to be when he/she grows up?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. What would you like your son/daughter to be when he/she grows up?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

9. How many years would you like your son/daughter to stay in school?

   1 - some high school
   2 - graduate high school
   3 - vocational college (2 yr. beyond H.S.)
   4 - 4 yr. college
   5 - graduate school
   6 - do not know

10. How many years do you think your son/daughter will stay in school?

    1 - some high school
    2 - graduate high school
    3 - vocational college (2 yr. beyond H.S.)
    4 - 4 yr. college
    5 - graduate school
    6 - do not know

11. What do you think is the main purpose of the bilingual program?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

12. How do you feel the bilingual program has helped your child?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____